

A Win for Everyone

An agreement between the Area Technical Center in Jonesboro and Arkansas State University's (ASU) College of Engineering makes everyone a winner.

Under the agreement, students at ASU can take a hands-on CAD/CAM program at the technical center this summer in which they will craft plastic parts using the center's Haas CNC machines – equipment the university doesn't have. In the class, they will use a CAD program to draft precision drawings of parts from a hand-drawn image and produce the code necessary to create the part on the CNC milling machine.

Without the agreement, the ASU students would not get hands-on experience with the state-of-the-art equipment that's standard to area industry.

The summer class will be team taught by Michael Barrett, machine tool technology instructor at the center, and Dr. Charles Coleman, director of technology programs at ASU's College of Engineering.

But the university students aren't the only winners. Barrett says the agreement enables high school students who complete his two-year program at the center to earn three college credits in Machine Design and Practices from ASU. His first student to accept that offer is enrolling in ASU's engineering program this fall.

The agreement also makes winners out of the area industry. Barrett says the industry representatives serving on his advisory committee are always needing skilled people to work their machinery. With both the technical center and the ASU program producing students with experience on Haas equipment, area plants will be able to get the skilled workforce they need.

In fact, Southern Cast, which makes cast iron parts, has hired Barrett's student who will be going on to ASU in the fall. The company will get an employee who has two years of experience on the equipment (and who won gold at the 2005 state SkillsUSA Championships in CNC milling). The student will get a pay increase of nearly 80 percent over what he's making at a local discount store, will get to improve his skills and beef up his resume, and will get help with his ASU tuition. Talk about win-win.

Barrett himself also comes out a winner. He gets the experience of teaching college students and of working with university professors. He also cements his relationship with the technical center's industry partners by helping prepare more students for the workforce. On a side note, the experience has resulted in Barrett fulfilling a personal goal – going back to school to get his bachelor's in industrial engineering.

"It works out real nice," Barrett says. "I hope that more of my students will take advantage of this (the articulation agreement)."

Barrett currently teaches 49 students from six area high schools (the center serves 11 schools). Many of his students will go straight into the workforce, but he's hoping more of them will see the advantage to getting at least some college. To that end, his next step is to work out an articulation agreement with ASU's Beebe campus.

